



*Henry Lawson Wyatt,
"First at Bethel..."*

after the engagement said, had "no superior as an artillerist in any country." This was the period of lavishness and felicitations, before the earnestness of deadly war brought the restraint of realism to battle reports.

The Federals were at Newport News and Hampton under Major General Benjamin F. Butler. Butler had not yet become distasteful to the South because of his frictions with the civilian population of New Orleans. He was a Massachusetts politician and congressman who had been pushed ahead to solidify in the North the Democratic party's adherence to the war. At Big Bethel (there was a Little Bethel also, a Negro church five miles down the road toward Newport News) Hill learned that Butler was moving toward him, intent, as some have had it, on marching up the Peninsula and right into Richmond. By coincidence, Big Bethel was the name of the church where Hill had been baptized, and easily remembered. Hill threw up some slight works behind the creek in front of the church, sent out patrols, and waited.

Butler had a reconnaissance made of the position, then dispatched Brigadier General Ebenezer W. Peirce with converging regiments, one the celebrated Seventh New York, to oust the Confederates from their advanced post at Little Bethel and their main camp at Big Bethel. Major Lane meantime had been scouting ahead for Hill with